

HONORING SFC RONNIE
THOMPSON, JR.

HON. RON LEWIS

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Mr. LEWIS of Kentucky. Madam Speaker, I rise today to pay tribute to Sergeant First Class Ronnie Thompson, Jr., a remarkable soldier and citizen from Rineyville, Kentucky. SFC Thompson's recovery from a grave injury sustained while serving in Iraq has made him a source of inspiration among his fellow soldiers and throughout the extended Fort Knox community.

SFC Thompson joined the United States Army in 1991 and was assigned to the First Infantry Division. During his early tenure, he completed a deployment to Bosnia and two additional deployments to Kosovo. He was subsequently deployed to Iraq where he served as a Scout Platoon Sergeant with the Air Assault Quick Reaction Force.

On December 11, 2004, SFC Thompson was severely wounded by an improvised explosive device while participating in Coalition efforts in Iraq. He was air evacuated back to the United States and placed in emergency care at the Walter Reed Medical Center in Washington, DC. In the months and years that have followed, SFC Thompson has defied doctor's expectations, emerging from a coma and enduring countless hours of grueling physical therapy.

In his long convalescence, SFC Thompson continues to demonstrate the unique courage and keen sense of duty that made him such an exemplary soldier. In addition to the daily rigors of rehabilitation therapy, he has found time to serve his fellow soldiers as a volunteer at the Fort Knox Veteran Service Office. On the battlefield and off, SFC Thompson has answered the call of his country in a profound way, making deep personal sacrifices to serve others and preserve our freedom and way of life.

It is my great privilege to recognize Sergeant First Class Ronnie Thompson, Jr. today on the floor of the U.S. House of Representatives for his service to our country, support of our soldiers, and lifelong example of leadership and service. His unique achievements make him an outstanding American worthy of our honor and respect.

INJECTING THE IMPROVEMENT OF
EDUCATION INTO THE POLITICAL
DIALOGUE

HON. CHARLES B. RANGEL

OF NEW YORK

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Mr. RANGEL. Madam Speaker, in the interest of our national security, competitive standing in the world, and criminal justice system—I rise today to rouse dialogue on an issue that implicates all three: education. Recent numbers report that as few as 1 out of every 2 youngsters are not earning high school diplomas in our Nation's biggest cities. For those of us from districts where the need is great, these numbers are far from new, let alone startling. But even as they inspired alarm in

the wake of the report's release, they have failed to ignite a national conversation on an issue that demands action, not just today, but yesterday. That alarm has already, regrettably, been snuffed out. We remain, still, oddly hush-hush and complacent.

Many will make an argument of the heart, that to fail to equip these kids with the skills and knowledge they need to eschew poverty and criminality demonstrates an abominable lack of compassion. This is true. But allow me to also make an argument of the mind. These children cannot afford failure—and neither can we. As a nation, we drastically shrink our talent pool and our ability to compete on the global stage when we trade bodies in our college classrooms for bodies on the streets, in jails, even underground. We give way to the rise in influence of China and India and saddle the next generation with a workforce unfit for competition, perennially unemployed and underemployed. That is an explicit and direct threat to our national security.

A New York Times editorial—written by Bob Herbert, published on April 22, and titled “Clueless in America”—makes the case for an America that rises to this challenge, that takes note of our lack of progress, and moves with purpose and innovation towards correcting it.

CLUELESS IN AMERICA

We don't hear a great deal about education in the presidential campaign. It's much too serious a topic to compete with such fun stuff as Hillary tossing back a shot of whiskey, or Barack rolling a gutter ball.

The nation's future may depend on how well we educate the current and future generations, but (like the renovation of the nation's infrastructure, or a serious search for better sources of energy) that can wait. At the moment, no one seems to have the will to engage any of the most serious challenges facing the U.S.

An American kid drops out of high school every 26 seconds. That's more than a million every year, a sign of big trouble for these largely clueless youngsters in an era in which a college education is crucial to maintaining a middle-class quality of life—and for the country as a whole in a world that is becoming more hotly competitive every day. Ignorance in the United States is not just bliss, it's widespread. A recent survey of teenagers by the education advocacy group Common Core found that a quarter could not identify Adolf Hitler, a third did not know that the Bill of Rights guaranteed freedom of speech and religion, and fewer than half knew that the Civil War took place between 1850 and 1900.

“We have one of the highest dropout rates in the industrialized world,” said Allan Golston, the president of U.S. programs for the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. In a discussion over lunch recently he described the situation as “actually pretty scary, alarming.”

Roughly a third of all American high school students drop out. Another third graduate but are not prepared for the next stage of life—either productive work or some form of post-secondary education.

When two-thirds of all teenagers old enough to graduate from high school are incapable of mastering college-level work, the nation is doing something awfully wrong.

Mr. Golston noted that the performance of American students, when compared with their peers in other countries, tends to grow increasingly dismal as they move through the higher grades:

“In math and science, for example, our fourth graders are among the top students globally. By roughly eighth grade, they're in

the middle of the pack. And by the 12th grade, U.S. students are scoring generally near the bottom of all industrialized countries.”

Many students get a first-rate education in the public schools, but they represent too small a fraction of the whole.

Bill Gates, the founder of Microsoft, offered a brutal critique of the nation's high schools a few years ago, describing them as “obsolete” and saying, “When I compare our high schools with what I see when I'm traveling abroad, I am terrified for our work force of tomorrow.”

Said Mr. Gates: “By obsolete, I don't just mean that they are broken, flawed or underfunded, though a case could be made for every one of those points. By obsolete, I mean our high schools—even when they're working as designed—cannot teach all our students what they need to know today.”

The Educational Testing Service, in a report titled “America's Perfect Storm,” cited three powerful forces that are affecting the quality of life for millions of Americans and already shaping the nation's future. They are:

1. The wide disparity in the literacy and math skills of both the school-age and adult populations. These skills, which play such a tremendous role in the lives of individuals and families, vary widely across racial, ethnic and socioeconomic groups.

2. The “seismic changes” in the U.S. economy that have resulted from globalization, technological advances, shifts in the relationship of labor and capital, and other developments.

3. Sweeping demographic changes. By 2030, the U.S. population is expected to reach 360 million. That population will be older and substantially more diverse, with immigration having a big impact on both the population as a whole and the work force.

These and so many other issues of crucial national importance require an educated populace if they are to be dealt with effectively. At the moment we are not even coming close to equipping the population with the intellectual tools that are needed.

While we're effectively standing in place, other nations are catching up and passing us when it comes to educational achievement. You have to be pretty dopey not to see the implications of that.

But, then, some of us are pretty dopey. In the Common Core survey, nearly 20 percent of respondents did not know who the U.S. fought in World War II. Eleven percent thought that Dwight Eisenhower was the president forced from office by the Watergate scandal. Another 11 percent thought it was Harry Truman.

We've got work to do.

TRIBUTE TO MRS. MINERVA
“MINNIE” RAMIREZ

HON. HENRY CUELLAR

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, May 1, 2008

Mr. CUELLAR. Madam Speaker, I rise today to honor Mrs. Minerva “Minnie” Ramirez for her induction as a laureate in the 2008 Laredo Business Hall of Fame, and for her incredible dedication to her friends and colleagues in the business community of Laredo, Texas.

Minerva Ramirez was born on September 20, 1931, to a hardworking ranch family. She started her first job at the age of 12 sweeping floors at the local schoolhouse, and she began